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ABSTRACT

Project ESCAPE is sponsored by the Vigo County School Corporation of Terre Haute, Indiana, with the cooperation of Indiana State University. The unique characteristic of this project is that it is a competency-based teacher education program that has been created, tested, and implemented by practicing professional teachers. It is based on the assumption that if professional teachers assume some responsibility for the formal preparation of members of their profession, their own teaching skills will improve. Consequently, the target groups for the project include both preservice teacher candidates and inservice teachers. Fifty competency-based learning modules were written by teachers from the public/private elementary and secondary schools of Vigo County. These were then tested and placed in a tailor-made "resource center," a portable laboratory which contains (1) all the necessary references for the student to satisfactorily complete the modules; and (2) items such as color audiovisual tapes, audio tapes, and other general references. These resource centers are placed in all the schools of the county and in several locations at the university. Most of the modules are field-oriented and are designed to be completed in the public/private school classroom of the county. Practicum and prepracticum teacher education candidates from Indiana State University were placed with the participating teachers for a significant portion of their professional education course sequence. (Author/BD)

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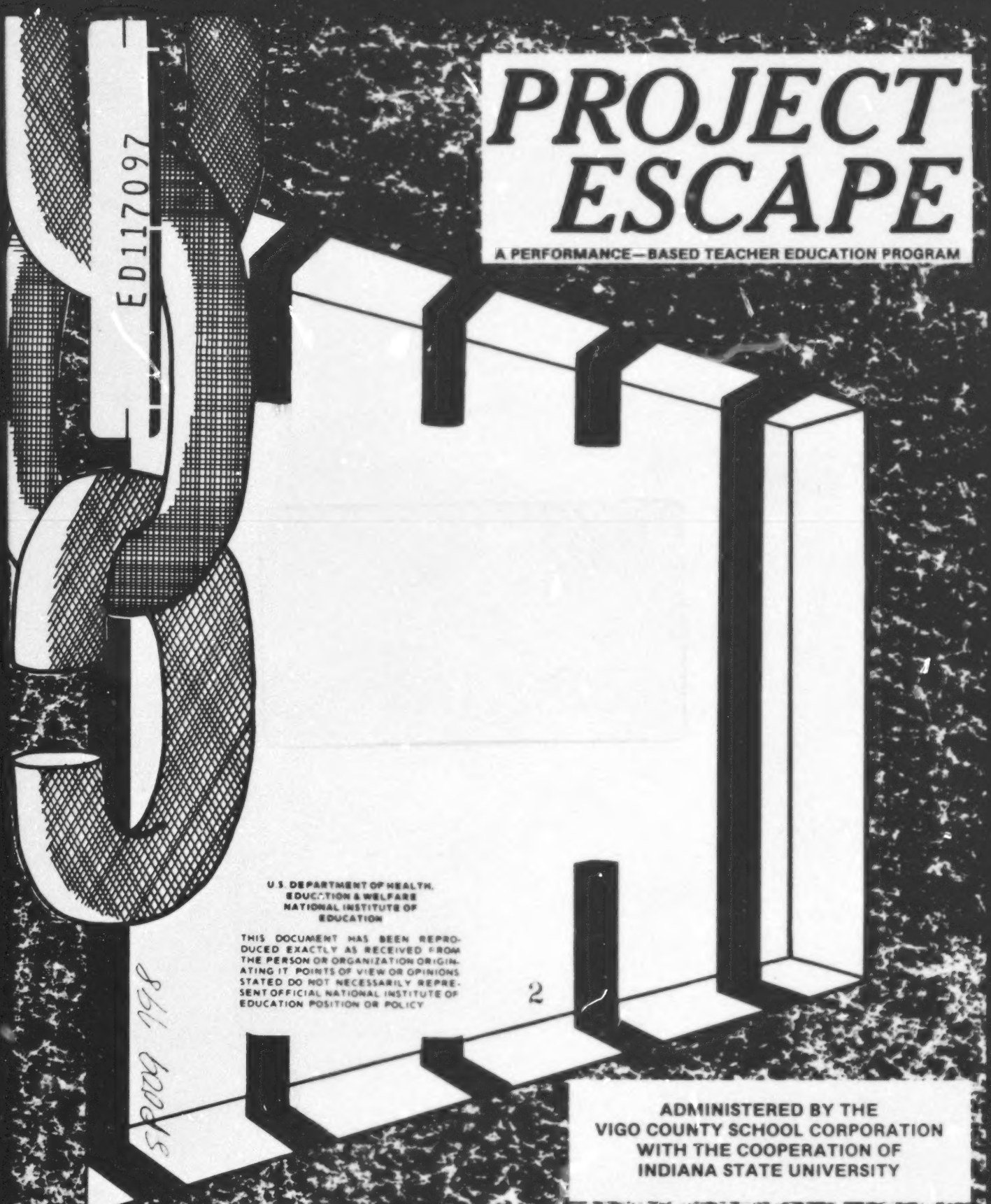
PROJECT ESCAPE

A PERFORMANCE—BASED TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM



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ADMINISTERED BY THE
VIGO COUNTY SCHOOL CORPORATION
WITH THE COOPERATION OF
INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

A TITLE III PROJECT
INDIANA STATE DEPARTMENT OF
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PROJECT ESCAPE

AACTE-DAA

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SUMMARY OF PROJECT ESCAPE

Project ESCAPE is a funded Title III project sponsored by the Vigo County School Corporation of Terre Haute, Indiana, with the cooperation of Indiana State University. The program is directed by Dr. Jerry Summers, Associate Professor of Secondary Education.

The unique characteristic of Project ESCAPE is that it is a competency-based teacher education program that has been created, tested, and implemented by practicing professional teachers. It is based on the assumption that if professional teachers assume some responsibility for the formal preparation of members of their profession, their own teaching skills will improve. Consequently the target groups for the project are two-fold: pre-service teacher candidates and in-service teachers.

Fifty teachers were selected by application from the public/private elementary and secondary schools of Vigo County. Over a period of time fifty competency-based learning modules were written by the teachers, tested, and placed in a tailor-made "resource center," a portable laboratory which contains all the necessary references for the student to satisfactorily complete the modules. The resource center contains items such as color audio-video tapes, audio tapes, and other general references. The resource centers are placed in all the schools of the County and in several locations at the University. Most of the modules are field-oriented and are designed to be completed in the public/private school classrooms of the County. Practicum and pre-practicum teacher education candidates from Indiana State University were placed with the participating teachers for a significant portion of their professional education course sequence. Comprehensive evaluation techniques have been created to test the effect of the program on both the pre-service and the in-service teachers.

EXPLANATION OF PROJECT ESCAPE

Project ESCAPE (Elementary-Secondary Cooperative Approach to Performance Education) is an innovative and exemplary program subsidized by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The program is sponsored by the local public school system, the Vigo County School Corporation, with the cooperation of Indiana State University. The model used provides for both pre-service and in-service education of teachers and teacher candidates and is based upon the following assumptions:

1. Skills of experienced professionals need to be sharpened and revised periodically in order that complacency or behavioral atrophy does not set in.
2. A teacher education program should be based upon the concept that individuals, whether they are pre-professional or professional, are different; they have different minds and experiences, and they learn in different ways.
3. Progress in a teacher education program may be based upon the the professional's demonstrated competency.
4. A teacher education program should provide for an abundance of experiences with children.
5. We learn by doing, and a corollary of that concept is that we also learn by teaching.
6. In a profession, the professionals assume some responsibility for the academic and professional preparation of members of their profession.
7. The evaluation of teaching should ultimately be based upon teacher products (i.e., pupil achievement and/or attitude development).

Developmental Procedures for Project ESCAPE

The developmental procedures for Project ESCAPE were planned to proceed in five distinct phases:

Phase I. Development of Learning Modules.--Fifty elementary and secondary teachers from the private and public schools of Vigo County, Indiana, were selected by application to participate in a summer workshop on the campus of Indiana State University. Five University consultants were contracted to facilitate the teachers' process of creating a competency-based teacher education model, identifying a number of teaching competencies, and writing learning modules which would help students and teachers attain the identified competencies. The model used was based on the Houston experience and includes (1) an objective(s), stated in behavioral terms, (2) a rationale, which delineates theory, practice, and research relative to the stated objectives, (3) a module guide which is designed to help the student or teacher work his way through the module, (4) a pre-assessment procedure, (5) alternative instructional activities, designed to facilitate attainment of the competency, (6) a post-assessment procedure, and (7) a remediation plan in the event competency has not been attained.

Phase II. Testing of Learning Modules.--During the first academic year of the project the prepared modules were duplicated and distributed to the involved personnel. Practicum and pre-practicum students were assigned to the ESCAPE teachers and required to attain competency level for each module that had been assigned. Modules were assigned to each student according to his or her needs and interests. Individual student guidance was provided by both the supervising teacher and the University consultant. Seminars were held periodically to enable students to discuss common problems. Evaluation data for the modules were gathered from each student and teacher in the program to detect ambiguities, determine relevance, assess learnings, and estimate time involved

for module completion. An outside evaluator was also contracted to evaluate each module. Supervising teachers met at scheduled monthly meetings to facilitate module evaluation, program familiarity, and administrative functions.

Phase III. Revision and Production of Resource Centers.--A second summer workshop was held on the campus of Indiana State University for the purpose of (1) refining the learning modules and other assessment instruments and preparing them for final printing, (2) creating further instructional activities and products which include full-color audio-video cassettes, audio cassettes, and written reference guides, (3) assembling the materials in a portable, tailor-made, self-contained resource center, (4) preparing computerized student evaluation forms for student placement purposes, and (5) developing a delivery system for both program dissemination and utilization.

Phase IV. Operation and Dissemination of the Program.--During the second academic year of the project the program was implemented on a full-scale basis. Practicum and pre-practicum students were again assigned to the ESCAPE teachers and required to complete the individualized competency-based program. The developed resource centers were placed in each of the schools and the University for utilization by teachers and students. In-service workshops were scheduled periodically throughout the year to acquaint non-ESCAPE teachers with the program and simultaneously to improve their teaching behaviors.

Phase V. Evaluation.--The final phase of the project involves the collection and analysis of data from teachers and students to determine if attitudes, pupil achievement, and/or overt teacher behaviors were affected as a result of participation in the project.

Objectives

The objectives of Project ESCAPE are two-fold: (1) to improve the quality of pre-service and in-service experiences for teachers and teacher candidates

in Vigo County, and (2) to create a superior teacher education model that is written by practicing, professional teachers and follows the competency-based theory.

Personnel Involved

Personnel directly involved in the project includes one full-time director and one full-time secretary, five curricular consultants, two evaluation consultants, twenty-five elementary teachers, and twenty-five secondary teachers.

Budget

Project ESCAPE has been well endowed financially with a budget of about $240,000 for a three-year period.

Contribution to the Improvement of Teacher Education

The unique component of Project ESCAPE is that it represents a teacher education program, from pre-service through in-service, that was created and tested by practicing professional teachers. The curriculum is heavy on practice and represents the concerns of practicing teachers rather than college professors. Pre-service teachers are exposed to the classroom early; in-service teachers are encouraged to improve their practices in connection with their normal teaching functions. In fact, almost all professional education content may be acquired in the public/private school station. Certification is recognized as a license to teach, but it also connotes responsibility for the professional teacher to continue to develop his or her pedagogical skills.

Another contribution to the improvement of teacher education is the cooperative and competency-based nature of Project ESCAPE. The program has facilitated communications between the University and the public/private schools and also between the elementary and secondary segments within both the University and the schools. The competency-based approach is personalized

and human; the students preparing to teach are required to demonstrate their competencies, but they are able to maintain their individual dignity. In fact, they are encouraged to capitalize on their unique personality characteristics in their classroom teaching; the learning modules facilitate this process.

Evaluation Methods and Results

As of this writing the evaluation phase of Project ESCAPE is not complete. With the help of two outside evaluation consultants and the Title III Evaluation Team of the Indiana State Department of Public Instruction, the attitudes of individual teachers and students have been carefully monitored. Interaction analyses have been made to gather baseline data which will be compared to data designed to test the teachers' intentional efforts to demonstrate different kinds of teaching techniques (i.e., guided discovery, lecture and demonstration, convergent and divergent questioning strategies, etc.). Standardized achievement data of the public/private school pupils are also gathered to test whether the level of teacher flexibility obtained will have any effect upon pupil achievement. Pre-post achievement data on University students will help to determine gain coefficients.

Preliminary data indicated that ESCAPE is not without problems. Frustrations were experienced by many of the teachers, especially in the writing phase, but there is considerable evidence to indicate that the professionals are proud of their product and their contribution to teacher education, and they overwhelmingly believe that the ESCAPE program provides a superior experience for the University students. The students have evaluated the program positively and have indicated that the required modules have facilitated their teaching process by providing them with guidelines and "how to" programs for accomplishing tasks which should be considered routine for the classroom.